

A BIT OF HISTORY FOR OLD AND YOUNG

NO. 1972

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 10, 1887,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.”
Genesis 48:15, 16.

JOSEPH was one by himself. In Jacob's family he was like a swan in a duck's nest, he seemed to be of a different race from the rest, even from his childhood. He was the son of old age, the son of the elders, that is, a child who was old when he was young, in thoughtfulness and devotion. He reached an early ripeness, which did not end in early decay. In consequence of this, Joseph was one by himself in the peculiarity of his trials. Through his brothers' hatred of him he was made to suffer greatly and at last was sold into slavery, and underwent trials in Egypt of the severest kind. “The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him.” But, brethren, see the recompense, for he had blessings which were altogether his own. “His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.” He was as distinguished by the favor of God as by the disfavor of his brethren. When Jacob is old and about to die, he gave Joseph a blessing all to himself, in addition to that which he received with his brothers. In the forty-ninth chapter we read, “Gather yourselves together, and hear, you sons of Jacob: and hearken unto Israel, your father,” and they did so, and received as a family such blessings as their father's prophetic eye foresaw, but before this, “by faith Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph” at a private interview especially granted to them. Had not his tribulations abounded, his consolations would not so have abounded. Do you seem yourself, my friend, to be marked out for peculiar sorrows? Do the arrows of affliction make your life their target, and are you chastened above all other men? Do not be regretful, for the arrows are winged by covenant love, which designs by their wounds to prepare you for a special work which will lead up to a special benediction from your Father who is in heaven. The day will come when you will be grateful for every smart you now endure; yes, grateful for that bitter pang of unkindness from your brethren, though now it tortures your heart. The abundance of the revelation of God is usually joined with a thorn in the flesh either before or after it. Notwithstanding your grief, there shall yet be born to you, as to Joseph, a Manasseh, for God shall make you forget all your toil, and an Ephraim, for God shall make you fruitful in the land of your affliction. You shall be blessed above all others. “Even by the God of your father, who shall help you; and by the Almighty, who shall bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: the blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.” Surely it is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth; his shoulders shall be the better able to bear the government when God shall lay it upon them. Instructed by affliction, the man shall become a father to his people, and a comforter to the afflicted.

Our text tells us that Jacob blessed Joseph, and we perceive that *he blessed him through blessing his children*, which leads us to the next remark, that no choicer favor could fall upon ourselves than to see our children favored of the Lord. Joseph is doubly blessed by seeing Ephraim and Manasseh blessed. Dear young people, to whom I now speak, your fathers can say, “We have no greater joy than this; that our children walk in the truth.” If any of you who are unconverted knew the deep searching of heart of

your parents about you, I think you would not long be careless and indifferent about divine things, and if you could conceive the flashes of heavenly joy that would light up your parents' hearts if they saw you saved in the Lord, it would be an inducement to you to consider your ways, and turn unto the Lord with full purpose of heart. God Himself, next to giving to His chosen the covenant of grace, can do them no greater earthly kindness than to call their children, by His grace into the same covenant. Will you not think of this?

Those of us who are parents are bound to do our best, that our children may be partakers with us of the divine inheritance. As Joseph took Ephraim and Manasseh to see their aged grandfather, let us bring our children where blessings may be expected. Let us be careful of the company into which we take our sons and daughters. Let us never conduct them where they may receive harm rather than benefit. Carefully, lovingly, wisely, using no undue severity, let us guide them into likely places for the divine benediction, and encourage them to seek the blessing for themselves by the fact that their parents are seeking it for them. The father who will not seize every opportunity of getting a blessing for his Ephraim and Manasseh is not likely to see the lads seeking the blessing for themselves. Especially should this care be taken by parents who are growing rich, whose offspring will be tempted by this very fact to seek grander society than the poor people of God can afford them. I doubt not that these two sons of Egypt's prime minister were exposed to exceedingly great temptations. As the sons of a very wealthy and distinguished parent, their tastes might lie in an Egyptian direction. I believe that they were nevertheless greatly swayed to the right side, and led to worship the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, by the zeal of their father, Joseph, and by the recollection of the benediction of their dying grandfather. There is no trace of their having inclined to the religion of the king and the nobles of Egypt, but they adhered to the faith of their father. Oh that all the descendants of Puritan fathers might be steadfast to the pure truth of God in these evil days!

Furthermore, observe that *if we want to bless young people, one of the likeliest means of doing so will be our personal testimony to the goodness of God.* Young men and women usually feel great interest in their fathers' life story—if it is a worthy one—and what they hear from them of their personal experience of the goodness of God will abide with them. We all read biographies and we value the results of experience which we find there, but the biographies of our own relatives are peculiarly treasured, and when these biographies are not read, but spoken, what wonderful force they have! I recollect in my younger days hearing a minister, blind with age, speak at the communion table, and bear witness to us young people, who had just joined the church, that it was well for us that we had come to put our trust in a faithful God, and as the good man, with great feebleness and yet with great earnestness, said to us, that he had never regretted that he had given his heart to Christ as a boy, I felt my heart leap within me with delight that I had such a God to be my God. His testimony was such as a younger man could not have borne, he might have spoken more fluently, but the weight of those eighty years at the back of it made the old man eloquent to my young heart. We who are growing grey in our Master's service ought not to be backward to speak well of His name. Why, my brother, you will not be able to do so much good in heaven as you can on earth, for they all know about it up there, but men here need our witness to the God whom we have tried and proved. Let us make occasions in which we may speak well of the Lord, even the God who has fed us all our life long and redeemed us from all evil. This is one of the best ways in which to bless the lads. The benediction of Jacob was intertwined with his biography; the blessing which he had himself enjoyed he wished for them, and as he invoked it he helped to secure it by his personal testimony.

One thing further; I want you to note, that *Jacob, in desiring to bless his grandsons, introduced them to God.* He speaks of "God before whom my fathers did walk: God who blessed me all my life long." This is the great distinction between man and man; there are two races, he that fears God, and he that fears Him not. The religion of this present age, such as it is, has a wrong direction in its course. It seeks after what is called "the enthusiasm of humanity," but what we want far more is enthusiasm for God. We shall never go right unless God is first, midst, and last. I despair for benevolence when it is not based upon devotion. We shall not long have love to man if we do not first and chiefly cultivate love to God. What our boys need in starting in life is a God; if we have nothing else to give them, they have enough if

they have God. What our girls need in quitting the nurture of home, is God's love in their hearts, and whether they have fortunes or not, is a small matter. In fellowship with God lies the essence of true human life; life in God, life by the knowledge of the Most High, life through the Redeeming Angel—this is life indeed.

Jacob died as one who had been delivered from all evil, yes, even the evil of old age. His eyes were dim, but that did not matter, for his faith was clear. I love to think that we are going where our vision of God will not be through the eye, but through the spiritual perceptions. These were brighter in Jacob in his old age than ever before, his faith and love, which are the earthly forms of those perceptions, were apprehending God in a more forcible manner than ever, and therefore signified little that the eyes which he would need no longer were failing him. We cannot say that he was in decay, after all, for he was losing what he only needed in this world of shadows, and was gaining fitness for the higher state. His gracious faculties grew as his bodily faculties declined, and therefore, he felt that his life was ending in a fullness of blessing such as he wished for the children of his dearest son. How ardently do I wish the like blessing for all the young people before me! The Lord God Almighty bless you! When your earth-born faculties fail you, may heavenly graces more than supply their place!

All this is introduction, so now we must come at once and plunge into the discourse, and I will be brief upon each point of it. Jacob's testimony, wherewith he blessed the sons of Joseph, has in it four points.

I. First, HE SPEAKS OF ANCESTRAL MERCIES; he begins with that "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." As with a pencil he sketches the lives of Abraham and Isaac. He does not fill in with coloring, but the outline is perfect, you see the two men in their whole career in those few words—"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk."

They were men who recognized God and worshipped Him, beyond all others of their age. God was to them a real existence; they spoke with God, and God spoke with them; they were friends of God, and enjoyed familiar acquaintance with him. No agnosticism blinded their understandings, and deadened their hearts. They were worshippers of the one living and true God. Happy children who have such fathers! Happier children who are like such fathers!

They not only recognized God, but *they owned Him in daily life*. I take the expression, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk," to mean that He was their God in common life. They not only knelt before God when they prayed, but they walked before Him in everything. When they went forth from their tents, and when they returned from their flocks, they walked before God. They were never away from His service, or without His presence. He was their dwelling place. Whether they sojourned under an oak or dwelt by a well, whether they entertained strangers or walked in the field to meditate, they lived and moved in God. This is the kind of life for you and for me; whether we live in a great house or in a poor cottage, if we walk before God we shall lead a happy and a noble life, whether that life is public or obscure. Oh that our young people would firmly believe this!

They walked before God, that is, *they obeyed His commands*. His call they heard, His bidding they followed. Abraham left country and kindred to go to an unknown land which God would show him; yes, more, he took his son, whom he greatly loved, and stood prepared to sacrifice him at God's command. Isaac also yielded himself up to be slain, if so Jehovah willed. To them the will of the Lord was paramount; He was law and life to them, for they loved and feared Him. They were prompt to hear the behests of God, and rose up early to fulfill them. They acted as in the immediate presence of the All-Seeing.

To the full *they trusted Him*. In this sense they always saw Him. We sometimes talk about *tracing* Him. We cannot trace Him, except as we trust Him, and because they trusted, they traced Him. Notwithstanding all the danger and difficulty of their pilgrim state, they dwelt in perfect security in an enemy's land, for the Lord had said, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." They were serene and tranquil because they walked before God, knowing Him to be their friend, and that He was their shield and their exceedingly great reward. For temporal things they had no anxiety for they lived upon the All-sufficient God. Therefore these two men, Abraham and Isaac, though much tried, led peaceful lives; they conversed with heaven while they sojourned on earth.

They enjoyed the favor of God, for this also is intended by walking before Him. His face was towards them; they sunned themselves in His smile. God's love was their true treasure. We read that God had blessed Abraham in all things, and of Isaac we hear even the Philistines say, "We saw certainly that the Lord was with you." God was their wealth, their strength, their exceeding joy. I say again, happy sons who have such ancestors! Happier still if they follow in their track!

So Jacob spoke of Abraham and Isaac, and so can some of us speak of those who went before us. Those of us who can look back upon godly ancestors now in heaven must feel that many ties bind us to follow the same course of life. Had they transgressed against the Lord our duty would have called us to quit the ways of the family, even as Abraham left his kindred who dwelt on the other side of the flood, but as their way was right, we are doubly called to follow it, because it is the good old way, and the way our godly fathers trod. *There is a charm about that which was prized by our fathers.* Heirlooms are treasured, and the best heirloom in a family is the knowledge of God. When I spoke, the other day, with a Christian brother, he seemed right happy to tell me that he sprang from a family which came from Holland during the persecution of the Duke of Alva, and I felt a brotherhood with him in claiming a like descent. I dare say our fathers were poor weavers, but I had far rather be descended from one who suffered for the faith than bear the blood of all the emperors within my veins. There should be a sacredness to you young people in the faith for which your ancestors suffered. Choose not the society of Egypt, and its wealth and honors, but keep to the stock of Israel, and claim the inheritance of Jacob as Ephraim and Manasseh did. Let it not be said that as your family increased in riches it departed from the living God. Shall the goodness of God be perverted into a reason for apostasy?

The way of holiness in which your fathers went is *a fitting way* for you, and it is seemly that you maintain the godly traditions of your house. In the old times they expected sons to follow the secular calling of their fathers, and although that may be regarded as an old-world mistake, yet it is well when sons and daughters receive the same spiritual call as their parents. Grace is not tied to families, but yet the Lord delights to bless to a thousand generations. Very far are we from believing that the new birth is of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man. The will of God reigns here supreme, and absolute, but yet there is a sweet fitness in the passing on of holy loyalty from grandfather to father, and from father to son. I like to feel that I serve God "from my fathers." I feel that it is right and comely that I should be found preaching out of my whole soul the same doctrine which my grandfather and my father preached, and equally fit that my sons should be found, as they are, preaching none other gospel than that which we have received—"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." I say again, if our fathers were wrong we ought boldly to dissent from them, and obey God rather than man, but where they are right we are bound to follow them. I stood last Wednesday in a sort of dream as I gazed upon my much-beloved grandfather's place of sepulcher. I was encouraged by seeing the record of his fifty-four years of service in the midst of one church and people, and I rejoiced that, could he rise from the dead, he would find his grandson preaching that same old-fashioned and much-despised Calvinistic doctrine of the grace of God which was his joy in life and his comfort in death.

A godly ancestry *casts responsibility* upon young people. These Ephraims and Manassehs perceive that their fathers knew the Lord, and the question arises, Why should they not know Him? O my beloved young friends, the God of your fathers will be found of you and be your God. The prayers of your fathers have gone before you; let them be followed by your own. Be hopeful of being heard at that mercy seat where they found grace to help in every time of need. They died in the hope that you would fill their places; shall not their hopes become facts? Do I speak to some who have godly parents in heaven, and yet they are themselves pursuing the ways of sin or of worldliness? Registered upon that file are your mother's prayers. I trust they will yet be heard. Even now they stand like a hedge about you, making it hard work for you to go to hell. Will you force your way to perdition over a father's grave? Will you, by a desperate effort, push aside your pleading mother's form, and pursue your dreadful road to ruin? If so, you will involve yourselves in tremendous guilt. I beseech you hear the tender voice of love which now invites you to be blest.

A godly ancestry should invest a man's case with *great hopefulness*. May he not argue, "If God blessed my ancestors, why should He not bless me? If they sought mercy, and found it, why should He

not me? My father and my mother were not perfect, any more than I am, but they had faith in God, and He accepted them and helped them. If I have faith in God He will accept me, and be faithful to me. They were saved as sinners trusting in the blood of Jesus, and why should not I?" I beseech you put this argument to the test, and you will find it hold good.

II. Thus we have seen Jacob seeking to bless his seed by bearing testimony to the blessings which God had bestowed upon his house. Now he comes to deal with PERSONAL MERCIES. The old man's voice faltered as he said, "The God which fed me all my life long." The translation would be better if it ran, "The God which shepherded me all my life long."

He spoke of the Lord as his shepherd. Jacob had been a shepherd, and therefore he knew what shepherding included; the figure is full of meaning. There had been a good deal of Jacob about Jacob, and he had tried to shepherd himself. Poor sheep that he was, while under his own guidance he had been caught in many thorns, and had, wandered in many wildernesses. Because he would be so much a shepherd to himself, he had been hard put to it. But over all, despite his willfulness, the shepherding of the covenant God had been exercised towards him, and he acknowledged it. O dear saints of God, you to whom years are being multiplied, give praise to your God for having been your shepherd. You delight in the twenty-third Psalm, sing it sometimes with variations by using the past tense, "The Lord has been my Shepherd, and I have known no want. He has made me to lie down in green pastures; He has led me beside the still waters. Yes, though I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death in times of great darkness, yet I have feared no evil: for He has been with me, His rod and His staff have comforted me." Bear your witness to the shepherding of God, for this may lead others to become the sheep of His pasture.

This shepherding had been perfect. Our version rightly says that the Lord had fed Jacob all his life long. Take that sense of it, and you who have a daily struggle for subsistence will see much beauty in it. Jacob had a large family, and yet they were fed. Some of you say, "It is all very well of you to talk of providence who have few to provide for." I answer, it is better still to talk of providence where a large household requires large provision. Remember Jacob had thirteen children, yet his God provided them bread to eat and raiment to put on. None of that large company was left to starve. You think perhaps that Jacob was a man of large estate. He was not so when he began life. He was only a working man, a shepherd. When he left his father's house he had no attendants with camels and tents. I suppose he carried his little bit of provision in a handkerchief, and when he laid down that night to sleep, with a stone for his pillow, the hedges for curtains, the heavens for his canopy, and the earth for his bed, he had no fear of being robbed. God was with him, but apart from this, he had nothing to begin life with but his own hands. Whatever he received from his father Isaac afterwards, he had at first to fight his own way, but he knew no lack either at the beginning or at the end, for he could speak of the great Elohim as "the God which fed me all my life long." Hundreds of us can say the same. I remember one who came to be wealthy who used to show me with great pleasure the tree axle of the truck in which he used to wheel his goods through the streets when he began in business; I liked to see him mindful of his original. Mind you do not go and say, "See how I have got on by my own talents and industry!" Talk not so proudly, but say, "God has fed me." Mercies are all the sweeter when seen to come from the hand of God.

But besides being fed Jacob had been *led*, even as sheep are guided by the shepherd who goes before them. His journeys, for that period, had been unusually long, perilous and frequent. He had fled from home to Padanaram; after long years he had come back to Canaan, and had met his brother Esau, and after that, in his old age he had journeyed into Egypt. To go to California or New Zealand in these times is nothing at all compared to those journeys in Jacob's day. But he says, "God has shepherded me all my life long," and he means that the great changes of his life had been wisely ordered. At home and in exile, in Canaan and in Goshen, God had been a shepherd to him. He sees the good hand of God upon him in all his wanderings, until he now finds himself sitting up on his bed and blessing Joseph through his sons. I am glad that he went into detail with these young men, for they needed to be confirmed in their fidelity to God. They were in a perilous condition, for they had the *entree* of the rank and fashion of Egypt, and were tempted to forsake the poor family of the Hebrews. Some of you young fellows begin where your fathers left off, and having the means of self-indulgence, you are apt to follow the fashions and frivolities of the period. Oh that the Holy Spirit may make you feel that you want God with you with wealth as

much as your fathers needed God without wealth! You may come to beggary yet with all your inheritance if you cast off the fear of the Lord and fall into sin. You, who begin life with nothing but your own brains and hands, trusting in your father's God, shall yet have to sing as your fathers sang, "the God which fed me all my life long." Young men and young women beginning life, I charge you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is not life to live without God; you miss the kernel, the cream, the crown of life if you miss the presence of God. Life is but a bubble blown up of toil and trouble without God. Life ends in blighted hope if you have not hope in God. But with God you are as a sheep with a shepherd—cared for, guided, guarded, fed, and led, and your end shall be peace without end.

III. Thirdly, bear with me while I follow Jacob in his word upon REDEEMING MERCIES. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil." There was to Jacob a mysterious Personage who was God, and yet the Angel or messenger of God. He puts this Angel in apposition with Elohim, for this Angel was God. Yet was He his Redeemer. He saw Him doing the office of the next-of-kin; though God, He was his *goel*, and as his Kinsman, effected redemption for him. Jacob's faith enabled him, like Job, to know that his Redeemer lives. He saw that this covenant messenger had redeemed him from all evil, and he magnified the name of the Lord who revealed Himself in this Angel. When he was in his sorest straits, this Redeeming Angel always interposed. He fell into an evil state through the influence of his mother, and he did Esau serious wrong. He fled for his life, and at that time there was a great gulf between him and God. Then that Angel came in, and bridged the gulf with a ladder by which he might rise to God. The kinsman, God, came in, and showed him how the abyss might be crossed, so that he might return to his God. When he was away in Padanaram he began to sink very low, while chaffering with churlish Laban. Then again the Angel came and said, "Get you out from this land, and return unto the land of your kindred." The Redeeming Angel held back wrathful Laban, and when Esau came to meet him in hot anger the Angel specially appeared to Jacob. The Angel wrestled, as a Man, with Jacob to get Jacob out of Jacob, and raise him into Israel. How marvelous was the redemption which was worked for him that night at Jabbok! Jacob came forth from the conflict limping, but he walked before the Lord far better than before. That same mysterious person had bidden him go down into Egypt with the promise that He would go down with him. It was the Angel of God's presence who held His shield over Jacob, and preserved him from all evil.

Brothers and sisters; let us also tell of the redeeming mercies of the Lord Jesus towards us. He redeemed us on the bloody tree, but He has also redeemed us from our death in sin. Do you remember the place and time when Jesus first met with you? Perhaps not. But blessed be the Redeeming Angel that quickened me into spiritual life! I recall the place and time with pleasure. He redeemed us also from despair; when, under a sense of sin, we could not dare to hope, He came to us and showed us our healing in His wounds and our life in His death. Afterwards, when our corruptions began to arise, and we had a hard battle to believe that such sinners were indeed saved, the Redeeming Angel confirmed our faith, and gave us inward strength. Do we not well remember when He said unto us, "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you"? I want you to look back and remember the times when you were sick, and this Redeeming Angel so sweetly visited you that you were half afraid to get well, for fear you should lose His presence; your bed had become a throne to you.

You remember, too, when that pinch came in business, so that you could not see how to provide things honest in the sight of all men; then Jesus revealed His love and bade you think of the lilies and the ravens, which neither spin nor sow, and yet are clothed majestically and fare sumptuously. Many a time has the Lord delivered you because He delighted in you. When you were likely to fall into sin, when you were very wrong in spirit, He beheld you in pity, and restored your soul. Though you were so lukewarm that He was ready to spue you out of His mouth, yet He knocked at your door, and when you admitted Him He came in and supped with you, and your soul was soon on fire with love to Him. He restored your soul, and the love of your espousals came back to you. Blessed Redeemer, how graciously do You deliver! Oh that we more often thought of the interpositions of the loving Christ! He did not only redeem us when He died, but He redeems us still by His living power. This is the sum of our life; the angel of the covenant has delivered us day by day, is delivering us, and will deliver us to the end. Do you wonder that we commend Him to our offspring, and desire to commit them to His loving care? Young friends

who know not the Savior, I would gladly lead you to this Guardian Angel, this God-like Man who will save you from all evil from this day forth and forevermore.

IV. Now comes the last point—I do not know if anyone has gone to sleep in this close atmosphere, but if so, let him kindly wake up, for I have somewhat to say which will interest him. Jacob has spoken of ancestral mercies, personal mercies and redeeming mercies, and now he deals with FUTURE MERCIES, as he cries “*Bless the lads.*” He began with blessing Joseph, and he finishes with blessing his lads. O dear friends, if God has blessed you, I know you will want Him to bless others. There is the stream of mercy, deep, broad, and clear; you have drunk of it, and are refreshed, but it is as full as ever. It will flow on, will it not? You do not suppose that you and I have dammed up the stream so as to keep it to ourselves. No, it is too strong; too full a stream for that. It will flow on from age to age. God will bless others as He has blessed us. Unbelief whispers that the true church will die out. Do not believe it. Christ will live, and His church will live with Him till the heavens are no more. Has He not said, “Because I live, you shall live also?” “Oh,” you say, “but we shall not see such holy men in the next generation as in past ages.” Why not? I hope the next age will see far better men than any of those who are with us at this time. Pray that it may be so. Instead of the fathers, may there be the children, and may these be princes before the Lord!

The stream of divine grace will flow on. Oh, that it may take our sons and daughters in its course! “*Bless the lads.*” Sunday school teachers, is not that a good prayer for you? Pray the Lord to bless the lads and the lasses, because He has blessed you. There is the stream, it must flow somewhere; pray, “Lord, make it flow to my family, and to my class.” For Your mercy’s sake, gracious Lord, “bless the lads.”

We need not say in what precise form or way the blessing shall come; let us leave it in all its breadth of inconceivable benediction. May the Lord bless our youth as only He can do it, and if He causes them to fear and trust Him, He will be blessing all of us, and blessing ages to come. Upon these Ephraims and Manassehs will depend the work of the Lord in the years to come. Therefore, with emphasis we pray, “Bless the lads.” As for us, we are content to work on, saying, “Let Your work appear unto Your servants,” but our anxious desire is that our children may reap the result of our labors, and therefore we add, “and Your glory unto their children.”

In closing, I wish to bear a personal testimony by narrating an incident in my own life. I have been preaching in Essex this week, and I took the opportunity to visit the place where my grandfather preached so long, and where I spent my earliest days. Last Wednesday was to me a day in which I walked like a man in a dream. Everybody seemed bound to recall some event or other of my childhood. What a story of divine love and mercy did it bring before my mind! Among other things, I sat down in a place that must ever be sacred to me. There stood in my grandfather’s manse garden two arbors made of yew trees, cut into sugar-loaf fashion. Though the old manse has given way to a new one, and the old chapel is gone also, yet the yew trees flourish as aforetime. I sat down in the right hand arbor and I thought of what had happened there many years ago. When I was a young child staying with my grandfather, there came to preach in the village Mr. Knill, who had been a missionary at St. Petersburg, and a mighty preacher of the gospel. He came to preach for the London Missionary Society, and arrived on the Saturday at the manse. He was a great soul-winner, and he soon spied out the boy. He said to me, “Where do you sleep, for I want to call you up in the morning.” I showed him my little room. At six o’clock he called me up, and we went into that arbor. There, in the sweetest way, he told me of the love of Jesus, and of the blessedness of trusting in Him and loving Him in our childhood. With many a story he preached Christ to me, and told me how good God had been to him, and then he prayed that I might know the Lord and serve Him. He knelt down in that arbor and prayed for me with his arms about my neck. He did not seem content unless I kept with him in the interval between the services, and he heard my childish talk with patient love. On Monday morning he did as on the Sabbath, and again on Tuesday. Three times he taught me and prayed with me, and before he had to leave, my grandfather had come back from the place where he had gone to preach, and all the family were gathered to morning prayer. Then, in the presence of them all, Mr. Knill took me on his knee, and said, “This child will one day preach the gospel, and he will preach it to great multitudes. I am persuaded that he will preach in the

chapel of Rowland Hill, where (I think he said) I am now the minister.” He spoke very solemnly, and called upon all present to witness what he said. Then he gave me sixpence as a reward if I would learn the hymn—

*“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.”*

I was made to promise that when I preached in Rowland Hill’s Chapel that hymn should be sung. Think of that as a promise from a child! Would it ever be other than an idle dream? Years flew by. After I had begun for some little time to preach in London, Dr. Alexander Fletcher had to give the annual sermon to children in Surrey Chapel, but as he was taken ill, I was asked in a hurry to preach to the children. “Yes,” I said, “I will, if the children will sing ‘God moves in a mysterious way.’ I have made a promise long ago that so that should be sung.” And so it was; I preached in Rowland Hill’s Chapel, and the hymn was sung. My emotions on that occasion I cannot describe. Still that was not the chapel which Mr. Knill intended. All unsought by me, the minister at Wotton-under-Edge, which was Mr. Hill’s summer residence, invited me to preach there. I went on the condition that the congregation should sing, “God moves in a mysterious way”—which was also done. After that I went to preach for Mr. Richard Knill himself, who was then at Chester. What a meeting we had! Mark this! He was preaching in the theater! His preaching in a theater took away from me all fear about preaching in secular buildings, and set me free for the campaigns in Exeter Hall and the Surrey Music Hall. How much this had to do with other theater services you know—

*“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.”*

After more than forty years of the Lord’s loving-kindness, I sat again in that arbor. No doubt it is a mere trifle for outsiders to hear, but to me it was an overwhelming moment. The present minister of Stambourne meeting house and the members of his family, including his son and his grandchildren, were in the garden, and I could not help calling them together around that arbor, while I praised the Lord for His goodness. One irresistible impulse was upon me; it was to pray God to bless those lads that stood around me. Do you not see how the memory begat the prayer? I wanted them to remember when they grew up my testimony of God’s goodness to me, and for that same reason I tell it to you young people who are around me this morning. God has blessed me all my life long, and redeemed me from all evil, and I pray that He may be your God. You that have godly parents, I would specially address. I beseech you to follow in their footsteps that you may one day speak of the Lord as they were able to do in their day. Remember that special promise, “I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me.” May the Holy Spirit lead you to seek Him this day, and you shall live to praise His name as Jacob did.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GENESIS 47.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—916, 214.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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